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ABSTRACT

The Collaborative Learning Network: Project Genesis, a partnership between California State University, San Bernardino, and the Ontario-Monclair School District (California) and its consortium districts is a multi-faceted program consisting of three levels of training and support. Phase one, Undergraduate Service Learning, recruits potential teacher candidates by providing undergraduate credit for working in elementary and middle school classrooms. Phase two, Project Genesis, Preservice Training, integrates teaching, learning theory and methodology, and classroom management courses with classroom practice during the preservice year. In phase three, Beginning Teachers' Project Learn, new teachers are assigned to mentor teachers for their first 2 years of teaching, and also attend workshops covering topics such as planning instruction, teaching models, classroom management, assessment, and cultural diversity. Of the 79 teachers who received their credentials between 1992 and 1996 through Project Genesis, 99 percent are still teaching, and 97 percent of these are still teaching at their original school site. While 25 percent of Project Genesis participants became bilingual teachers, all worked in classrooms with limited English proficient students. Also project participants, after their first year of teaching, indicated that they felt well prepared to take on responsibilities of full-time teaching and more able to meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students. The blending of coursework and practice during the preservice year helped participants learn how to develop and implement curriculum effectively. (ND)

ED 404 315

University and Public School Collaboration: Developing More Effective Teachers through Field-Based Teacher Preparation and New Teacher Support Programs

By Veronica Robbins and Mary Jo Skillings

Between 1992 and 1996, approximately 80 teachers have received their training and certification through the Collaborative Learning Network: Project Genesis. This innovative teacher preparation program represents more than six years of collaboration between California State University, San Bernardino and the Ontario-Montclair School District and its consortium districts. University faculty, school district personnel, school principals and teachers sought to identify areas of weakness in teacher education programs. They worked together to develop a consistent supportive program for university students that would begin prior to and during their fifth year, the preservice year, and continue through their first two years of teaching.

Since the 1992-93 academic year the program has been supported by a Comprehensive Teacher Education Institute Grant. The program is multi-faceted and consists of three levels of training and support for teachers: Phase I - Undergraduate - Service Learning; Phase II - Preservice Year: Project Genesis ; Phase III - First two years of teaching: Project Learn.

Phase I - Undergraduate Service Learning

In an effort to recruit potential teacher candidates from a variety of specialized fields, particularly math and science, an undergraduate program of service learning was initiated. Under this phase, students receive undergraduate credit for working in elementary and middle school classrooms. High schools and junior colleges are targeted for visitation and recruitment information regarding the service learning program through

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the university and opportunities in the teaching profession. Approximately a dozen students each year since 1992 have participated in this level of the Collaborative Learning Network.

Phase II - Project Genesis - Preservice Training

Teaching, learning theory and methodology and classroom management courses are integrated with classroom practices during the preservice year of training. All courses are taught a local school sites where the students receive instruction from university faculty teamed with district specialists and experienced classroom teachers. Resident teachers go through an application process and are visited by district personnel to ensure that they are prepared to have teacher preparation students in their classrooms for a year. They also commit to taking training in mentoring beginning teachers and in supervising student teachers.

Developed with the philosophy that students learn from having a cohort experience, students work together as pairs and are teamed with resident teachers (one primary and one intermediate level) to provide opportunities for students to plan, teach, reflect, and learn together. Students remain as pairs until they begin their formal student teaching.

Students have both a primary (K-2) and upper grade (3-6) experience with at least three weeks of lead teaching provided at each level. During this experience, students are responsible for planning, preparing, organizing and implementing all learning and management experiences in the classroom. All activities are approved by the resident teacher. At the completion of the academic year, students are eligible for a California preliminary Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential with a Crosscultural Language and

Academic Development (CLAD) emphasis or a Multiple Subjects Credential with a Bilingual Crosscultural Language and Academic Development (BCLAD) emphasis.

The power of this program is in the full-time experience and commitment to follow the entire school calendar. Students experience the opening and closing of school, holidays, and the reality of the culture of school and schooling. They have the opportunity to acquaint themselves with what it is like to participate in evaluation meetings, parent conferences, and the full gamut of faculty experiences. In fact, Project Genesis participants report that becoming a member of the professional community is one of the things they value most about the program. They learn how to work with other teachers in a collegial and cooperative way long before they are fully responsible for a classroom on their own. From the very beginning of their training, they learn how to counteract the sometimes isolating nature of teaching and to become part of a professional team.

In addition, during their preservice year, Genesis participants are allowed to substitute teach in their placement classrooms. This allows them to earn a small income without compromising the integrity of the program. The school district also has the opportunity to hire these teachers who have been trained in their schools and who have proved themselves as highly competent.

Phase III - Beginning Teachers: Project Learn

New teachers who were former Genesis participants hired by the district are given additional support and staff development. As part of the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program, these teachers have the opportunity to participate in Project Learn, the third phase of the Collaborative Learning Network. These new teachers are assigned to specially trained mentor teachers for their first two years of teaching. While

participation in this enhanced mentoring program is completely voluntary for new teachers, 87% of Project Genesis participants employed by the Ontario-Montclair School District also chose to participate in Project Learn. Together, the two programs provide a comprehensive system of training and support for new teachers.

In Project Learn, mentors are released from their own classrooms for twenty days during the school year. On these days, the mentor provides a variety of support and assessment services for their mentees such as: classroom observations, teaching demonstrations, advising on curriculum development, and instruction and management issues. Mentors also work 150 hours each year beyond their regular hours to provide additional support.

Mentor teachers have become adept at working with beginning teachers. Many of these expert teachers have gone on to take additional graduate work and training as well as become researchers in the classroom together with university faculty members.

Project Learn beginning teachers, in addition to receiving the individualized support of their mentors, also attend specially designed workshops covering topics such as planning instruction, models of teaching, classroom management, assessment and cultural diversity. Teachers are also given the opportunity to observe other teachers providing exemplary instruction.

Finally, Project Learn beginning teachers, with the help of their mentor teachers, develop individual growth goals in a variety of instructional areas, focusing their attention on where they need to improve. All of these components combined create thoughtful, reflective practitioners.

Distinctive Features of the Phase II: Project Genesis portion of the Collaborative Learning Network

- All coursework is taught at the school sites.
- The assumption of teaching responsibilities for the pretern is a gradual and individual process occurring over the entire school year.
- Preterns observe in a wide variety of classrooms before beginning student teaching.
- Preterns are placed in classrooms in pairs to learn from one another before their lead teaching experience.
- Preterns experience different teaching styles with a variety of resident teachers.
- All participants are encouraged to take risks and explore varied teaching strategies.
- All participants are viewed as learners and experience a sense of collaboration and collegiality.
- Resident teachers are provided opportunities to enhance their own professional growth.
- Resident teachers and university faculty work together in providing preterns with theory-based learning experiences.
- Flexibility is provided for each school to structure the program in its own way within the general guidelines of the program.

Critical Elements of Project Genesis

- A commitment on the part of all participants to the mission and goals of the program.
- Commitment to a collaborative approach to learning.
- Open discussion and communication.

- Active involvement by all participants in the functioning of the program.
- Mutual support.

Success of the Collaborative Learning Network

There are many ways to measure the success of a program like Project Genesis. One of them is by tracking how many teachers have chosen to stay in the profession. To date, seventy-nine teachers have received their credentials through Project Genesis. Of those, 99% are still teaching and 97% are still teaching at their original school site.

While twenty-five percent of Project Genesis participants become bilingual teachers, all work in classrooms with limited English proficient students. One of the goals of the program has been to increase the number of teachers in the profession from underrepresented groups. As the population of students of color increases, the teaching force must continue to change as well. A full one-third of Project Genesis preterns were bilingual (BCLAD) candidates during the 1995-96 school year, a higher percentage than ever before. BCLAD preterns visited undergraduate Spanish and latino culture classes on the CSUSB campus and discussed both teaching as a profession and the Project Genesis option for credentialing.

In response to surveys sent to Project Genesis teachers after they have been teaching in the classroom as credentialed teachers for at least a full year, Genesis participants comment that they felt very prepared to take on the responsibilities of full time teaching. They note that they knew what to expect, and had the opportunity to try out a wide variety of teaching strategies during the preservice year, enabling them to be both more competent and confident when it was time for them to step into the classroom as a professional teacher. In addition, they were more prepared than were teachers who had

been trained in traditional teacher education programs to meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse student populations. It should also be noted that the blending of coursework and practice during the preservice year helped participants learn how to develop and implement curriculum effectively. Project Genesis teachers begin their first year of teaching with a long-range view of the school year and plan accordingly, rather than scrambling from lesson to lesson or unit to unit as is often common with beginning teachers who are overwhelmed with the responsibilities of teaching.

Things to Remember in Creating Your Own Collaboration

Of all the things that have become clear in this venture, the most important is that this cannot be undertaken alone. Universities and school districts must work together. The following guidelines will be helpful in developing a collaboration:

1. Communication is critical!

Communication between university and district administration, between administration and resident teachers, between resident teachers and preterns - communication is critical at every level. Time needs to be included in every schedule for teachers, preterns and administrators to talk about issues and concerns. Ninety percent of the problems experienced by a collaboration are the result of a failure to communicate effectively. The issues that are the most controversial and the most difficult to discuss are the ones that *must* be confronted if meaningful change is going to occur.

2. A collaboration implies an equal partnership.

The school district and university *both* need to view the collaboration as an equal partnership. This means that decision-making power must be shared. The advisory committee must include key decision-makers from both organizations and it must have

power to direct the program. In Genesis, an Advisory Committee made up of university and school district representatives meets quarterly to address issues of governance and policy, and to guide the direction of the program. In addition, a Steering Committee with pretern, resident teacher, administrative and university representation meets monthly to resolve issues of communication and to ensure that the program runs smoothly on a daily basis.

3. Think creatively... and design the program from there.

Brainstorm all the characteristics of an ideal teacher training situation (or mentor program) and begin to build your program from there. Assume that new structures and configurations *are* possible. Don't limit your ideas to current practice. Create a vision and then determine what obstacles must be overcome to make it a reality.

4. Involve all participants.

If the collaboration is to be successful, all participants must feel that they have a voice in the process and that their voice is heard. Teachers, university faculty, principals, student teachers - all need to be included in the process. Including everyone (through representation, surveys, or individual attendance) requires more effort and makes most tasks take longer, but the payoff in support for the program is immeasurable.

Conclusion

The partnership between California State University, San Bernardino and the Ontario-Montclair School District began years ago as individuals in both institutions began to have the discussion about how they could work together to make a difference in the teaching profession by providing better preparation for teachers. Both groups could see that working alone was not enough; any significant change would take a cooperative effort

and would only be successful if both parties were willing to take a critical look at their practice. The effort is ongoing. Each year the program grows, changes and takes on a new form as it incorporates the participants' knowledge and experience.